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AUTHOR Saide, Tom
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ABSTRACT

The experimental Contact Teacher Centre at Winton State Primary School was established in March 1983 to expand the avenues of service delivery for 20 isolated Queensland primary school children from 14 families living within an 80 kilometer radius of Winton. The aims of the Centre were to: (1) assist correspondence pupils with their work; (2) assist home tutors with teaching and management problems; (3) act as a resource center for families with children enrolled in correspondence education programs; (4) liaise with other distance education programs in order to maintain a consistent educational approach, avoid overlap between services, and facilitate the exchange of ideas; and (5) help meet the social needs of students through activity days, mini-schools, and school activities such as swimming and sport. The Centre was initially funded with \$3,000, staffed by a 20%-time teacher, and housed in a room furnished with a telephone, answering machine, and tea and coffee making facilities. During 1983, 3 home tutors made 26 school visits, 4 home tutors made 31 telephone calls, the answering service recorded 9 calls, and 2 activity days were sponsored. Evaluation indicated the concept and potential of the Centre were considered worthwhile. (NEC)

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PRIORITY COUNTRY
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PRIORITY COUNTRY AREA PROGRAM, QUEENSLAND

PROJECT REPORT 2

WINTON CONTACT TEACHER CENTRE REPORT

TOM SAIDE

Priority Country Area Program

GPO Box 1605

Brisbane Q.4001

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PRIORITY COUNTRY AREA PROGRAM, QUEENSLAND

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INTRODUCTION:

BACKGROUND:

The major avenues of service delivery for isolated school children enrolled as correspondence students in Queensland are:- the Primary Correspondence School (PCS), the Secondary Correspondence School (SCS), Schools of the Air (SOTA), the Isolated Childrens' Special Education Unit (ICSEU) and itinerant teachers from both the State Education Department and the Priority Country Area Program (PCAP). In addition two experimental Contact Teacher Centres have recently been established, one in Cloncurry in 1981 and a second in Winton in March 1983.

The Contact Teacher Centre at Winton is a further avenue of service delivery for correspondence students and was planned to operate in conjunction with the above distance education services. The Centre was established as an alternative to the Outback Mobile Teaching Service (OMTS), an itinerant teaching service of the Priority Country Area Program, and is designed to provide educational assistance to isolated home tutors and students studying by correspondence. Winton was selected as an ideal site for the Centre since a relatively large number of families, 14, lived in close proximity to the town.

The Centre was established at the Winton State Primary School, with funds provided by the North-West PCAP Regional Committee and is administered by the Queensland Education Department through the Regional Director and School Principal. The teacher allocated to the Centre is employed by the Queensland Department of Education. The principal is responsible for the overall operation of the Centre and the contact teacher is responsible for the day to day working of the Centre.

NATURE OF THE SERVICE:

Consideration was given to this type of distance education service by the Select Committee on Education in Queensland in 1979. In paragraph 4.5 of the Report of the Select Committee on Education in Queensland, a recommendation was made for the introduction of Regional Schools of Distance Education. It was also recommended that these Regional Schools:

establish out-stations in towns where a number of correspondence students are located in the surrounding district. The out-stations would be

attached to local schools which correspondence students could attend on a regular "visit" basis as circumstances permit. This would allow the students contact with others of their own age and give them valuable experience of the classroom situation. This would be particularly helpful for students who receive their primary education by correspondence but attend school medical and dental checks and the provision of specialist remedial assistance where this is required.

(Select Committee on Education in Queensland Fifth Interim Report, 'Isolated Children and Isolated Schools'. Government Printer, Qld. p5. 1979).

The Winton Contact Teacher Centre is similar in concept to that of an "out-station" as mentioned in the Select Committee Report. The Centre has been established to act as a small school within an existing school, providing direct and immediately available help to correspondence families within an 80 kilometre radius of Winton.

It was intended that two primary benefits would stem from the Contact Teacher Centre:-

1. Immediate support for home tutors:

Through the provision of a direct telephone line and answering machine, home tutors would be able to discuss problems or seek the advice of the contact teacher as needs arose. If the contact teacher was unavailable, messages would be checked on the answering machine two or three times a day and a return call would normally be made within 24 hours. Home tutors could also arrange for their child to attend school either for classroom work, work with the contact teacher or to use various resources at the school. In providing assistance for correspondence students, it was planned that the contact teacher would liaise with all those distance education agencies which provided services to groups of students or individual students utilising the Centre. It was expected that this form of service delivery would provide more immediate assistance and minimise problems caused by postal delays.

2. An economical alternative to the Outback Mobile Teaching Service:

It was expected that the Contact Teacher Centre would be more economical than the Outback Mobile Teacher Service. Major economies could be made since the contact teacher would not need to spend long periods of time travelling, although short occasional visits may be necessary. Decreased travelling time would alleviate both the need

for the purchase of a special vehicle and the need for payment of a regular daily allowance.

Further economies were possible since the contact teacher at Winton was to spend only about 20% of his/her time carrying out contact teacher duties. This relatively small amount of time was believed to be sufficient since it was planned to develop the Centre gradually over the first twelve months.

AIMS OF THE CONTACT TEACHER CENTRE:

During the first twelve months of the Centre's development, five primary aims emerged:-

1. To assist correspondence pupils with correspondence papers.
2. To assist home tutors with teaching and management problems.
3. To act as a resource centre for families with children enrolled in correspondence education programs.
4. To liaise with other distance education programs in order to maintain a consistent educational approach, avoid overlap between services and facilitate the exchange of ideas.
5. To help meet the social needs of students through activity days, mini-schools and school activities such as swimming and sport.

PHYSICAL SETTING:

Since the primary means of service delivery was initially intended to be via telephone contact and school visits, the Centre is located in a separate room at the school. Tea and coffee making facilities are provided in the room which serves as:

- a reception interview lounge for parents/home tutors,
- a "home" room for correspondence students, and
- class/resource room for instruction periods for correspondence students.

A telephone and an answering machine are also installed in the room to enable home tutors to:-

- telephone the Centre for assistance if problems arise

with PCS instructional papers or other educational matters, and

-make an appointment with the contact teacher or arrange for students to participate in classroom activities, sports days or other school activities.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE CENTRE:

The submission for funds to establish the Winton Contact Teacher Centre was tabled at the North West PCAP Regional Committee meeting in November, 1982. The submission was approved to the value of \$3 000.

Together with the submission to establish the Centre, the Regional Committee Chairman and the Co-ordinator of the North West PCAP tabled a proposal to provide a more balanced service to all families in the North West with children enrolled as correspondence students. The proposal involved the rationalisation of areas serviced by the ten itinerant teachers and the two contact teachers. The proposal which was accepted by the Committee included the introduction of the Winton Contact Teacher Centre as shown in Map I.

After funding was approved for the Centre, the Principal of the School began the process of organising suitable accommodation and a teacher to staff the Centre.

In consultation with the Primary Correspondence School it was decided to include all families within an 80 kilometre radius of Winton. At the end of 1982, the number of families in the area was 15. However, in 1983, three of these families had either decided to send their children to school or had left the area. Two new families entered the area during the year, giving the current total of 14 families and 20 students receiving services from the Contact Teacher Centre.

On the 30th November, 1982, each participating family was informed of the existence of the Centre and its facilities by the Regional Director. A copy of the letter sent by the Regional Director is attached as Appendix A.

The next contact made with parents was by the Principal on 1st February, 1983. In this letter, the Principal introduced the contact teacher and invited home tutors to utilise the Centre either by telephone contact or by visiting the school. A copy of this letter is found at Appendix B.



During the following month of March the contact teacher telephoned all home tutors to introduce himself and offer assistance. A few home tutors were unavailable at the time and they were followed up by letter. Later in the same month the teacher was able to visit most of the families and meet the children. Following this visit, home tutors were left to access the Centre as the need arose.

METHODOLOGY:

Information for this report was obtained from:

- records kept by the Contact Teacher Centre
- discussions with Centre staff
- interviews with home tutors participating in the Centre

Records kept by the Contact Teacher Centre enabled information to be obtained regarding the number and type of telephone calls made to and from the Centre and the number of school visits and home visits. The Centre was also able to provide the relevant documentation relating to the setting up of the Centre.

To obtain more detailed and accurate information concerning the organisation of the Centre and the reactions of participants, two visits were made during 1983.

The first visit, an exploratory one, was made during February. The purpose of this visit was to examine the operations of the Centre, the goals of the Centre and the expectations of participants. During this visit discussions were held with the Regional Director, the school principal, the contact teacher and two home tutors.

During the last week of August a second visit was made to the Centre. The primary purpose of this visit was to interview the home tutors participating in the Centre in order to obtain their reactions to the service.

The decision to interview rather than to send mailed questionnaires was based on the small number (fourteen) of respondents and the inherent problems which such small samples pose for the reliability and validity of structural questionnaire data. Furthermore, given the above situation it was clear that more accurate and detailed information would be obtained through a qualitative rather than quantitative approach.

Hence it was decided to use the semi structured interview to collect data.

Although it would have been desirable to interview each of the fourteen respondents separately rather than in groups this was not logistically possible. The major

problems in conducting group interviews are the possibility of group bias and the tendency for respondents with differing perceptions to withhold their views. However these two effects can be controlled to some extent provided the interviewer is aware of their presence.

In order to conduct separate interviews at Winton it would have been necessary to visit each of the fourteen properties within an 80 kilometre radius of the town. This would have taken a minimum of five working days assuming each respondent was available for interview at the desired time. Both the time and cost of undertaking this exercise made it impractical. It was therefore decided to ask each home tutor if they could arrange to meet at the Contact Teacher Centre on one of two days for a group interview and discussion. Only four of the fourteen home tutors were unable to attend so it was decided to conduct interviews in this way.

Despite the difficulties associated with group interviews the two interviews held at Winton proved to be highly successful for both the interviewer and the home tutors. The interviewer was able to gain a detailed understanding of the perceptions of the home tutors and the context in which those perceptions were held. This would not have been possible through a questionnaire survey. Home tutors also benefited from the interview since they were able to express their concerns and discuss their perceptions with both the interviewer and later with the principal and contact teacher.

SECTION I

EXPLORATORY VISIT:

An initial visit was made by the evaluator to the Centre in February, 1983. The purpose of this visit was to examine the operations of the Centre, the goals of the Centre and the expectations of the participants.

OPERATIONS

Establishing the Centre:

At the time of the visit the contact teacher had been appointed, a room had been allocated and was being furnished and arrangements had been made to have a telephone and answering machine installed.

Contact had also been made with all participating families by both the Regional Director and the school Principal. The contact teacher was preparing to liaise with all families in order to facilitate their use of the Centre.

Although it was expected that the Centre would be fully operational by this time, several difficulties had been encountered. Due to the lack of any formal guidelines the early development of the Centre took a naturally slow pace. For example, details such as the methods for the ordering and payment of equipment and the method of petty cash reimbursement were not clear. Unavoidable time delays were also experienced with the installation of the telephone and answering machine and the furnishing of the room.

Further difficulties were encountered due to the lack of experience of the contact teacher with distance education. As a result, the contact teacher had to spend considerable time familiarising himself with the Primary Correspondence School's instructional papers as well as the services and resources available through other distance education agencies. This issue is discussed in more detail under the heading of "Induction Courses" later in the report.

Other problems experienced in establishing the Centre resulted from confusion about the role of the Centre and the nature of the service. Although it was clear that the initial service would involve telephone contact and school visits, there was no clear plan for the future development of the Centre. It was intended that the future planning for the Centre would depend on an analysis of the types of problems raised by home tutors and the nature of requests for assistance made by home

tutors. While this approach was valuable in that it would ensure the development of the centre in response to user needs, it did however cause some initial confusion for both home tutors and the contact teacher.

For the contact teacher there was a confusion of priorities, difficulty in establishing a clear role and difficulty in planning ahead to avoid time clashes between contact teacher duties and other school duties. For the home tutor there was confusion regarding the precise service to be offered. Although it had been explained that the service would develop gradually, home tutors had developed high expectations of the Centre and were unsure about the future of the Centre. Home tutors reported, for example, that they were uncertain as to whether or not activity days and mini schools would be held and if so when they would be held. This lack of certainty about the development of the Centre led to some disappointment and impatience on the part of home tutors. A more detailed discussion of these issues will be undertaken under the heading "Goals and Expectations".

Contact Teaching Time:

Initially the Contact Teacher service was restricted to telephone contact and school visits by home tutors. The contact teacher responded to requests from home tutors rather than initiate action from the Centre. It was believed that initially 20% of the contact teacher's time would be sufficient to carry out these duties. It was also planned to increase the amount of time available should the demand for services increase.

During the establishment of the Centre it became obvious that the time required to set up the Centre and become familiar with correspondence papers, as well as to provide the above service, exceeded the 20% of time available. Furthermore the amount of contact teacher time needed was difficult to determine in advance since it was not known what activities would be developed throughout the year.

Induction Course:

The need for an induction course for the contact teacher was considered to be essential as the teacher had not been involved in teaching by correspondence and was not familiar with distance education services and their operations.

The contact teacher attended the Brisbane based induction course arranged for the new staff of the North West Priority Country Area. The course was conducted

from the 7th to 11th March, 1983 and visits were made to PCS, ICSEU, Production Services Branch and Library and Resource Services Branch.

Unfortunately, the contact teacher was unable to visit a School of the Air. As a result it took some time for the teacher to become aware of the nature and operations of SOTA and the role they play in distance education. Liaison with SOTA is also necessary in order that the contact teacher may become familiar with the range of educational inputs received by each student.

As well as increasing awareness of the nature and operation of services available to correspondence families, induction courses have other benefits. Firstly, the contact teacher is able to canvass the views of professional distance education teachers and establish more firmly his or her role in the education of correspondence students. Secondly, by establishing direct contact with teachers and others involved in the students' education, the contact teacher can, through a comprehensive understanding of the services each student is receiving, maintain a consistent approach to the educational goals for each student. Finally, having established a personal line of communication with the students' teachers, the contact teacher is better able to make immediate interventions should problems arise.

While the induction course provided was valuable it was clear after discussions with the contact teacher that it could have been more extensive and held earlier in the school year. Since the contact teacher at Winton was unfamiliar with many aspects of distance education, he had to spend considerable time familiarising himself with the content of the instructional papers and the methods of teaching used by the PCS. In addition, he had to become familiar with the nature and operations of a wide range of other distance education agencies.

Reporting Procedures:

The contact teacher prepares a monthly report on the activities of the Centre. This report contains a record of all telephone contacts, school visits by students and parents and home visits. Also included is a report on the general progress of the Centre and reports on other activities such as seminars and activity days. This monthly report is sent to the Regional Director, the Principal, the PCAP Regional Co-ordinator and the Supervisors of the relevant Correspondence Schools.

Individual student's reports are sent to the year teacher at the relevant Correspondence School and SOTA, together with reports on mini schools and activity days.

Where a student is assisted by the ICSEU, reports on progression through its programs are sent to both this unit and PCS.

For the general information of others interested in the Contact Teacher Centre and as a means of keeping participating families up to date with current activities, a monthly newsletter was produced by the contact teacher. Separate reports were made on activity days and other special events and distributed as above.

GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS:

As mentioned previously in this report, five major goals emerged during the development of the Contact Teacher Centre:

1. To assist correspondence students with correspondence papers.
2. To assist home tutors with teaching and management problems.
3. To act as a resource centre for correspondence families.
4. To liaise with other distance education programs in order to maintain a consistent educational approach, avoid overlap between services and facilitate the exchange of ideas.
5. To help meet the social needs of students through activity days, mini schools and school activities such as swimming and sports days.

The initial, formally stated, goals of the Centre were twofold. Firstly it was envisaged that the contact teacher would be able to assist correspondence students by being available to answer specific telephone queries about correspondence papers. Secondly, the contact teacher would assist students who wished to attend the school for individual tuition or to participate in normal classroom activities.

It was not until later in the school year that the last three of the above goals were seen as being clear objectives for the Centre. However, as the Centre developed it became clear that all five objectives needed to be met if the fundamental goal of improving educational opportunities for correspondence students was to be met. Thus the above five goals emerged as being the primary aims of the Contact Teacher Centre.

With regard to the last three goals the contact teacher encountered some difficulties since the processes necessary to attain these goals were not clear. For

example, were home visits to be made on a regular basis or only initially as a means of meeting the families? To what extent was the contact teacher's role to be an active one in initiating activities or passive in responding to requests for assistance? What were his responsibilities to the various distance education agencies and finally, if the contact teaching time was to remain at 20% for most of the year, which activities were to take priority?

The resolution of these issues was compounded by the absence of a reference group to which the Principal and the contact teacher could refer. Whilst most matters could be dealt with adequately at the school level, the experimental nature of the project required input from outside the school, in order for the Centre to respond appropriately to the demands made of it. However, as the personnel and educational resources of a region such as the North West are widely dispersed and communications difficult, such input could not be organised in a formal way. The school was therefore forced to respond to these developmental needs largely on its own resources as each need arose.

Home tutors also reported some uncertainty about the activities of the Centre in its early development. A meeting planned for early February with all participating families, the Regional Director, the Regional PCAP Co-ordinator, the principal and the contact teacher, unfortunately did not eventuate. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the role of the Centre with the home tutors, obtain their reactions and answer any queries which they might have. As a result of this meeting not being held, the only information home tutors had regarding the policy and guidelines for the Centre was that they could contact the Centre by telephone in the event of any difficulties with their child's education and they could arrange for their child to participate in normal classroom activities through school visits.

Home tutors also felt that they did not have sufficient indication of what services would be available later in the year or how the service was to develop. They did not know if the home visits, activity days and mini schools available through the PCAP and State itinerant teaching service would also be available through the Centre and they were also unsure of the status of the contact teacher in relation their child's Correspondence School teacher and SOTA teacher.

As a result of this situation, home tutors had lost some confidence that the Centre would be able to provide the same level of services which had previously been provided by the itinerant teaching service.

CONCLUSION:

Many of the difficulties encountered during the developmental stages of the Winton Contact Teacher Centre could be overcome in any future Centres by developing more extensive guidelines regarding the establishment of Contact Teacher Centres and the type of services to be provided. In order to develop such guidelines it would be necessary to canvass the views and expectations of organisations involved in distance education. Although such an operation would be a time consuming undertaking, it is important that at least representatives of the relevant Correspondence Schools, Schools of the Air, the Regional Department of Education Office and the relevant school Principal be consulted.

After these discussions have taken place it would be possible to develop both a clearer notion of how the Centre relates to other distance education operations and a clearer statement of the role and responsibilities of the contact teacher. Following the development of these guidelines a meeting should be arranged with the home tutors participating in the Centre in order to inform them of the role and activities of the Centre. It is at this stage that conflicting expectations of the Centre should be resolved in order to allow the smooth establishment and operation of the Centre.

During the last week in August 1983, a second visit was made to the Contact Teacher Centre. The primary purpose for this visit was to interview the home tutors participating in the Centre in order to obtain their reactions to the service.

In general, home tutors believed that the concept of the Contact Teacher Centre was worthwhile, but they felt that the service was inadequate to meet their needs. There was also confusion about some aspects of the Centre. Both these issues will be discussed in this section.

USE OF THE CENTRE:

At the end of the 1983 school year a summary was made of the Centre's contacts for the year. This summary is presented in Table I.

It is clear from the Table that overall very few contacts were made by families throughout the year. Although 26 school visits were made, the majority of these were made by only three of the home tutors. Similarly the majority of the 31 direct telephone calls were made by only four of the home tutors. In all, only 6 home tutors accessed the Centre to any major degree. Table I also shows that only minimal use was made of the telephone answering machine with only nine calls being taken in 1983. Even considering the initial technical difficulties and the natural reluctance of home tutors to speak to a machine, this figure would seem to indicate a very low need for such an extended telephone service.

In general the service was not utilised as much as had been expected, although more use was made of the Centre's resources during the second half of the school year.

The main reason given by home tutors for the under-utilisation of the telephone service was that a similar service was available through other avenues. Home tutors are able to contact PCS through Telecom Australia's toll free 008 service. This service, previously known as INWATS, enables home tutors to contact their child's teacher from anywhere in the State for the price of a local call. The service operates for one hour each day, currently from 9.00 to 10.00 each morning. In 1983 this service operated from 11.00 a.m. to mid-day, however, this proved to be an awkward time for both home tutors and PCS teachers.

TABLE I

Number of Centre Contacts: 1983

Family	Contacts by Families			Contacts by the Centre	
	Answering Machine	Telephone Calls	School Visits	Telephone Calls	Home Visits
A	1	2	1	8	1
B	0	1	1	3	2
C	1	2	5	5	2
D	1	1	0	2	2
E	0	3	5	3	2
F	1	4	1	6	2
G	0	2	1	5	2
H	2	4	6	4	2
I	0	4	1	6	1
J	0	1	0	5	1
K	0	0	1	1	1
L	1	4	2	6	1
M	0	0	0	5	1
N	2	3	2	8	2
TOTAL	9	31	26	67	22

An average of about four or five calls per day were received in 1983, but this is expected to increase with the earlier operation of the service in 1984.

A further problem solving avenue is available to home tutors through the Mt. Isa School of the Air. A half hour session for home tutors is held each day enabling home tutors not only to have their own queries answered, but also to hear and discuss difficulties faced by other home tutors.

In general it would appear that there is not a great demand for immediate telephone contact for the resolution of problems arising from PCS papers. This is evidenced by the relatively few calls received by both the PCS, 008 service and the Contact Teacher Centre.

If there is a greater need for telephone contact than the utilisation rates suggest, then there is a need to establish this fact and in this regard it would be beneficial to evaluate the priority of telephone contact when drawing up guidelines for future Contact Teacher Centres.

With regard to school visits, most home tutors felt that this option had been available before the introduction of the Centre. Although PCS students had always been welcome to participate in school activities, the establishment of the Centre formalised the school visit and gave PCS students greater ease of access through the contact teacher.

Even given this greater ease of access to the school, the service was relatively under utilised (Refer Table I). The two major reasons home tutors gave for not making more frequent use of school visits were that students would fall behind with their PCS papers and miss SOTA lessons. In order to catch up with PCS papers, home tutors needed to spend more time teaching either at nights or weekends.

In order to overcome this problem home tutors believed that it would be helpful if students could spend some time working on their current PCS paper while visiting the school. They also believed that if a SOTA transceiver was located at the school, the problem of missed SOTA lessons would be overcome. Another factor which will increase the viability of school visits for PCS families in 1984, is the introduction of fortnightly PCS papers for students in years four to seven. This should enable home tutors to spread PCS work out more and allow more time for other educational activities.

Apart from the logistic difficulties mentioned above, some home tutors believe that there were other difficulties with school visits. These difficulties were related to the problem of consistency between classroom teaching procedures and the procedures used in PCS papers, and the problem of continuity between PCS papers and classroom lessons.

Despite these difficulties, the majority of home tutors still regarded school visits as valuable because of the positive social aspects associated with them. The majority of PCS students rarely have the opportunity to work and play with their peers and the school visit provides this opportunity and enhances the social and emotional development of isolated children.

With regard to home visits, it will be noted from Table I that all families received at least one visit. The first visit was made during the first half of the year and served as an introductory visit. A second visit was made to eight of the families during the second half of the year. Initially there was no clear indication of the priority of home visits and the second visits were made primarily at the request of home tutors. Due to the limited amount of time available to the contact teacher it was not possible to visit all families a second time.

As well as home visits, school visits and telephone contact, the Centre provided other services during the year. Two activity days were held at the Centre. The first was organised by the Mount Isa School of the Air and the second by the Contact Teacher. These activity days were held in order to achieve the following aims:

- to provide students with the opportunity to work with children of different ages and to learn more social and physical skills in a relaxed environment.
- to allow home tutors the opportunity to observe different motivational techniques employed by teachers and other home tutors.
- to offer home tutors the opportunity to exchange ideas, help teach the children new skills, observe the teaching methods of other home tutors and observe the relative performance of their own children.

Swimming lessons were also arranged by the Contact Teacher and correspondence students were also invited to compete in the Winton Primary School annual sports.

Finally, to further assist students a book club was formed and requests are answered by the contact teacher through the school library.

ISSUES OF CONCERN:

The main issues of concern for home tutors were the amount of contact teacher time available, the nature of the service and the role of the contact teacher.

Contact Teacher Time:

Home tutors were initially informed that the contact teacher would be spending approximately 20% of his total time undertaking contact teacher duties. While this situation was true, the principal had allowed for more time to be available to the contact teacher should the demand for the service warrant it. Most home tutors, however, believed that they only had access to 20% of the teacher's time and that contact teacher duties were secondary to the teacher's normal school duties.

This, in fact, was not the case and it was not until discussions were held with home tutors in August that they became aware of the true situation. It was always intended that contact teacher duties would take priority over other school duties and that more time would be made available should the demand for services increase. Although home tutors had been encouraged to request any service from the contact teacher that they felt necessary to meet their needs, they were initially reluctant to make such requests in the belief that their expectations could not be met.

The Nature of the Service:

Home tutors were also unclear about the nature of the service to be provided. Although they had been informed that the opportunity to request assistance was available through either telephone contact or school visits, there was no indication of the areas in which assistance was available. For example, if a home tutor had a specific query about a PCS instructional paper or procedure, or a School of the Air lesson or activity, were they to direct the query to PCS, SOTA or the contact teacher?

Home tutors were also informed that the service would develop gradually. This was important since the Principal was concerned not to offer services that could not be delivered. The difficulty for home tutors was that initially the level of service did not meet their perceived needs and they had no clear indication of how the service would develop. Home tutors reported that initially they expected the same level of services

available to other PCS families in PCAP areas, viz. home visits, mini-schools and activity days; although home tutors accepted that these services would not be immediately available, there was no definite plan for their introduction and this led some home tutors to question the value of the service.

The Role of the Contact Teacher:

Many home tutors were also confused about the role of the contact teacher. Was he to replace the PCS teacher as their child's teacher? Would he mark PCS papers? Should queries normally directed to SOTA or PCS be directed to the contact teacher?

It was not until the contact teacher had visited the families that these issues were clarified. The contact teacher's role was to facilitate the home tutors use of distance education services rather than replace them.

Reactions of Home Tutors:

The understanding of most home tutors was that the Contact Teacher Centre was fundamentally a problem solving service. They felt that the contact teacher was to act primarily as a trouble shooter rather than a service provider. Although they regarded this as a worthwhile function of the Centre, home tutors believed that it was inadequate to meet their needs. Thus, while home tutors believed that the overall concept of the Centre had potential, they also felt that the service as it stood, offered them no substantial advantages.

At the time of these interviews the two major services being offered were telephone contact and school visits. As detailed in the above section headed "Use of the Centre", home tutors expressed the view that these services were already available to them and that while the Centre's services had some advantages, they were, in general, a duplication of existing services.

Home tutors believed, however, that there were other areas in which the Centre could play a greater role. The vast majority of home tutors placed great importance on the value of home visits and believed that this service should be afforded a higher priority than it received in the initial year. Home visits enable the contact teacher to observe both the home tutor and student working in their own environment. Although he is able to assist both the home tutor and student with any specific problems they may be having, the contact teacher has an equally important role in supporting and encouraging home tutors. The majority of home tutors,

especially those new to the role, particularly value the supportive aspect of home visits as well as the objective assessment of the standard of their child's work.

While home visits have been in the past, and continue to be, highly valued by home tutors and while they have proved successful in meeting some of the needs of correspondence families, they have also been an expensive service to maintain. It was partly for this reason that the concept of a Contact Teacher Centre developed. Given that home visits made through the avenue of itinerant teaching teams have played such a major role in supporting education services to isolated families in Queensland, it would be beneficial to evaluate the role this service should play in future Contact Teacher Centres.

Home tutors generally agreed that the Contact Teacher Centre had considerable potential to provide educational services unsuited to the PCS and SOTA mediums. This particularly applies to cultural activities such as music, art and drama, the teaching of which is enhanced by access to school based resources and face to face contact. These types of activities also provide further opportunities for social interaction among correspondence students.

Home tutors agreed that both activity days and mini schools have the advantage of being able to pursue those aspects of the curriculum which are difficult to cover through PCS instructional papers and SOTA lessons. They also enhance the opportunity for social interaction among isolated students and all home tutors regarded their inclusion in the Centre's activities as a high priority.

Finally, the use of the Centre as a resource base was also seen to be important. This aspect of the service would benefit both students and families in that materials and other resources applicable to both individual papers and general curriculum areas would be readily available from the Centre. This would overcome the unavoidable mail delays experienced by home tutors requesting materials from other sources.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CENTRE:

The Winton Contact Teacher Centre was established at the beginning of the school year in 1983, however, several difficulties delayed the effective operation of the Centre until March of the same year.

The three major difficulties encountered in the early development of the Centre concerned the physical planning of the Centre, the training of staff and the lack of guidelines for the development of the Centre.

Physical Planning:

The physical planning of the Centre was unavoidably delayed due to the normal delays experienced with the installation of the telephone and the acquisition of furniture and technical difficulties with the answering machine. Problems were also experienced with procedural matters such as the methods for the ordering and payment of equipment and the method of petty cash reimbursement.

If delays in the physical establishment of future Centres are to be avoided, planning needs to be undertaken in the year prior to the first year of operation.

Staffing:

The training of Contact Teacher Centre staff emerged as an important issue after difficulties were encountered due to the lack of experience of the Winton contact teacher with distance education. As a result of this situation, the contact teacher had to spend considerable time familiarising himself with the instructional papers, as well as the services and resources available through other distance education organisations.

In order to provide the contact teacher with a working knowledge of distance education, he attended a one week induction course in Brisbane. Although the induction course proved to be extremely valuable, the contact teacher found that it did not go far enough in meeting his basic needs.

Given the difficulties encountered at Winton, it would appear that the most appropriate course of action in the future staffing of Contact Teacher Centres, would be to employ staff who are familiar

with distance education services, and in particular, PCS papers. In the event that such staff are unavailable, it is vital that an extensive induction course be undertaken early in the school year. Such an induction course should encompass visits to all distance education organisations.

Guidelines for the Development of the Centre; Role and Services:

Further difficulties were experienced in establishing the Centre, as a result of confusion about the role of the Centre and the nature of the service to be provided.

Apart from the generalised goal of assisting home tutors and correspondence pupils through access to immediate telephone contact and school visits, there were no other clear guidelines regarding the role of the Centre or the nature of services. Given the lack of guidelines, the principal and contact teacher decided to introduce the service gradually, reacting to situations as they arose.

The delay in introducing a full service posed difficulties for home tutors. As it was planned to introduce the service in response to client demands, it was not possible to predict which services would be introduced nor when they would be introduced. Even when home tutors expressed the desire for particular services, it was difficult to meet their needs since the contact teacher's time was limited by his obligation to fulfil other school duties.

The lack of guidelines also made it difficult for the contact teacher to establish what role the Centre should play in relation to other distance education services. The need for Contact Teacher Centres to liaise closely with other distance education organisations is therefore important. The Contact Teacher Centre is not a service that can operate in isolation from other distance education services and liaison is important not only in order to avoid the duplication of services, but also to ensure a consistent educational approach and the effective co-ordination of the activities of various distance education bodies.

In order to allow for the smooth introduction of future Contact Teacher Centres, it is important to resolve the issues of the role of the Contact Teacher Centres and the nature of the service they are to provide.

The proper resolution of these issues should involve the development of clear guidelines, based on an evaluation of the needs of home tutors, a

review of the range of services already available to home tutors and discussions with representatives from the various distance education organisations. The guidelines should cover such areas as the nature of the relationship between Contact Teacher Centres and other distance education services, the nature of the services to be offered, the role of the contact teacher and the amount of time necessary for the contact teacher to implement the service. These guidelines should be developed in consultation with the relevant correspondence schools, School of the Air, the Isolated Childrens' Special Education Unit, the Regional Department of Education Office, the Regional PCAP Committee and the school Principal.

THE AIMS OF THE CENTRE

In the introduction to this report, it was stated that two primary benefits would stem from the Contact Teacher Centre:- "immediate support for home tutors", and "an economical alternative to the Outback Mobile Teaching Service".

The Centre proved to be an economical alternative to the O.M.T.S., in that the purchase of a fully equipped vehicle and the payment of a regular daily allowance were unnecessary. Further economies were possible since only about 25% of the contact teacher's salaried time was spent on contact teacher duties.

Immediate support was available for home tutors through both telephone contact and school visits. As the Centre developed, however, it became obvious that further goals needed to be set if the Centre was to meet the perceived needs of correspondence families. As a result, the following five goals emerged:-

1. To assist correspondence students with correspondence papers.
2. To assist home tutors with teaching and management problems.
3. To act as a resource centre for correspondence families.
4. To liaise with other distance education programs in order to maintain a consistent educational approach, avoid overlap between services and facilitate the exchange of ideas.
5. To help meet the social needs of students through activity days, mini schools and school activities such as swimming and sports days.

The first two of these goals were the initial formally stated goals of the Centre, which were to be realised through the process of a telephone contact and school visits. The processes necessary to attain the latter three goals however, were not clear, and this caused difficulties for both the contact teacher and home tutors.

Difficulties for the contact teacher included the lack of guidelines regarding the most suitable means of achieving these goals and the lack of time to fully implement the more clearly perceived means to achieve these, such as activity days and mini-schools. From a practical viewpoint, the contact teacher would need to be released for more than 20% of the time in order to achieve the above five goals for the 14 correspondence families serviced by the Centre. This, however would add to the cost of the service and would lessen the economic rationale for the establishment of such Centres.

Clearly it is necessary to decide upon a program and its possible future development before deciding on the allocation of staff time.

For home tutors the main difficulties were the uncertainty about the aims of the Centre and uncertainty about the priorities of the Centre's activities. As mentioned previously, if the difficulties faced by the contact teacher and home tutors are to be avoided in future Centres, it is important that clear guidelines be developed which will cover the aims of the service to be provided and the methods of operation for the service. The uncertainty expressed by home tutors could also be avoided if home tutors are more clearly involved with the development of the Centre and are briefed at the time the Centre is established. This would ensure that the home tutors' expectations of the Centre were not beyond the scope of the Centre and were more in keeping with the intentions of the program.

Subsequent to the development of a set of clear guidelines, a meeting should be held with participating families prior to the establishment of any new Centre. This meeting should be used to inform home tutors of the aims and operations of the Centre, to answer queries and to resolve differing expectations regarding the aims of the Centre.

THE USE OF THE CENTRE

Details presented in Table I concerning contact made with the Centre during 1983 indicated that the telephone service and school visits offered by the Centre were generally under utilised. To some extent the problem of under-utilisation was due to the lack of guidelines mentioned above. There were also, however, other explanations for the situation.

Firstly, home tutors believed that they only had access to 20% of the teacher's time and that contact teacher duties were secondary to the teacher's other school duties. Although home tutors had been invited to make any request they wished of the Centre they were unsure what demands they could reasonably make on the Centre. As a result, home tutors were initially reluctant to request services over and above the telephone service and school visits already offered, in the belief that their expectations could not be met. In fact it was always intended that contact teacher duties would take priority over other school duties and that more time would be made available should the demand for services warrant it. However, home tutors did not become aware of this policy until August.

Secondly, home tutors tended not to use the telephone service because they already had access to both the PCS INWATS line and the SOTA home tutor half hour on a daily basis. In general, it appeared that there is not a great demand for extended telephone contact for the resolution of problems arising from correspondence education. This view is further supported by the relatively low rate of use of the INWATS line by families in the Winton Contact Teacher Centre as well as PCS families as a whole. It would appear that most of these needs are met by the SOTA home tutor sessions.

Finally, even though the Centre gave greater ease of access to the school for correspondence students, the school visit option was also underutilised. The main reasons home tutors gave for infrequent visits to the school, were that students would fall behind in PCS papers and would miss SOTA lessons. The majority of home tutors, however, still felt that school visits were valuable because of the positive social aspects associated with them. They also believed that the problem of missed SOTA lessons and PCS papers could be overcome by installing a transceiver at the Centre and allowing the student to do some PCS paper work at the school.

In general, it can be expected that difficulties related to the utilisation of Contact Teacher Centres will be resolved once the previously mentioned guidelines are established, indicating the nature of the services to be provided.

REACTIONS OF HOME TUTORS

The understanding of most home tutors was that the Contact Teacher Centre was to be used solely for the resolution of problems associated with PCS instructional papers and to provide access to the school through school visits. Although they regarded this as a worthwhile function of the Centre, the majority of home tutors believed that it was inadequate to meet their needs.

It was intended that the above approach would be used to gauge the reaction of home tutors and collate the types of problems students were having in order to establish the nature and extent of services which the Centre would need to provide. However, as was explained above, home tutors tended not to utilise the Centre as a problem solving service since they already had access to the toll free service at PCS and the home tutor half hour on SOTA. As a result it was difficult for the contact teacher to assess the needs of home tutors and correspondence students and home tutors became dissatisfied with what they saw as a limited service.

The types of services which home tutors felt best met their needs were home visits, activity days, mini schools, school based activities and the use of the Centre as a resource base. These services began to be introduced through the Contact Teacher Centre during the latter half of the school year.

The majority of home tutors placed a high emphasis on the importance of home visits and believed that the service should be afforded a higher priority than it received in the initial year. Most home tutors also agreed that both activity days and mini schools have the advantage of being able to pursue aspects of the curriculum which are difficult to cover through PCS papers and SOTA lessons. The use of the Centre as a resource base was also regarded as important.

While all of the above services have proved valuable in the past, there is a need to evaluate their relative benefits in order to determine which services would be best suited to implementation by future Contact Teacher Centres and which would be the best means of implementing these services. Such an evaluation would be most appropriately

carried out in conjunction with the development of guidelines as outlined above under the heading Guidelines for Development of the Centre.

CONCLUSION

Although there were clearly many difficulties in the establishment and development of the Centre, the majority of those involved believed that the overall concept was worthwhile and that the Centre had considerable scope for development.

While this report has raised many problems associated with the establishment and development of the Centre, it is important to note that a valuable service was provided throughout the year. Home tutors and correspondence students benefited from the Centre both socially through such activities as school sports days and swimming lessons and academically, through assistance provided by the contact teacher. The shortcomings raised by home tutors referred more to the type and extent of services rather than the quality of the service.

Much can be learnt from the Winton experience, to ensure that the same problems are avoided in the event of new Contact Teacher Centres being established. Although many of the initial difficulties at Winton were overcome throughout the year, the resolution of these difficulties took many months. The ability of future Centres to run smoothly and efficiently, will depend largely on forward planning for the Centre and the availability of guidelines concerning the role of the Centre and the nature of the services it is to provide.

It is important to note, however, that with such client centered services as the Contact Teacher Centre it should not be expected that all issues can be readily identified prior to implementation of the project. The particular needs of the area in which the Centre is to be located and the individual needs of the families involved will necessitate a responsive developmental plan as was the case in Winton. Although such flexibility is clearly necessary it needs to take place within a more structured framework than was available at Winton.

The fact that the Winton Contact Teacher Centre was able to adapt to the needs of the families it serviced, over the course of its first year of operation, would indicate that despite the difficulties encountered, such Centres have a clear potential for providing educational services to isolated correspondence students.

APPENDIX A



P.O. Box 250, Longreach, 4730.

Co-ordinator
Ph: Longreach 830

PRIORITY COUNTRY AREA PROGRAM - NORTH-WEST REGION

30th November, 1982.

State Primary School
125 Ibis Street
Longreach

Dear Mr. and Mrs.

According to the boundaries displayed on the accompanying map, your family is eligible for the assistance and programs as provided by the Contact Teacher Centre to be based at the Winton State School. At the time of writing this letter the selection of your support teacher has not been finalized. However it is anticipated our appointment will have been made by the New Year and you will be contacted by this teacher as early as possible.

For your information the service that will be available early in the new school year will include:

- a comfortably furnished room with refrigerator and tea making facilities will serve as:-
 - (a) Reception/interview lounge for parents, home tutors
 - (b) "Home" room for P.C.S. students
 - (c) Class/Resource room for individualized instruction periods for P.C.S. children.
- a telephone Answering Service attached that will enable you to:
 - (a) Telephone in for assistance if you have a specific query on the P.C.S. papers
 - (b) Make an appointment with the Contact Teacher, or have the Contact Teacher arrange for your child to participate in classroom activities/sports.

Should the Contact Teacher be elsewhere in the school at the time you phone, then your message on the Answering Service will ensure a prompt return call from the Contact Teacher.

A special meeting of families to be serviced by this Centre will be convened as early as possible in February.

Yours faithfully,

T.A. ROBERTSON
REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
NORTH-WESTERN REGION



Winton State School

(Primary and Secondary)

Telephone: 96
P.O. Box 298

Cork Street,
Winton 4735

Our Reference: 776/0283

1st February, 1983.

Dear Home Tutor,

Towards the end of last year you will recall receiving a letter from Mr. T. Robertson, Regional Director of Education in Longreach, in which he advised you that a Contact Teacher Centre was to be established at the Winton State School for the express purpose of assisting Home Tutors and students enrolled with the Correspondence School. I am pleased to be able to advise you that the Centre has been established and that a teacher has been appointed to be your contact source.

Your Contact Teacher is Mr. Stephen Hallas. Steve has had a number of years teaching experience and has worked within all the Primary grades. This is his third year in Winton, and while here he has also done some teaching within the Secondary Department. He is a very pleasant and approachable man, and I believe he is eminently suitable for the duty he has been given.

Within the next few days Steve will contact you personally by phone so that you can get to know each other. Naturally he will want to find out some details concerning the children on Correspondence, and so I would appreciate it if you could give him all the assistance possible.

Unfortunately, not all the physical aspects of the development of the Contact Teacher Centre have been completed as yet, but that should not, and does not, prevent Steve from giving whatever assistance he can right now. Should you have any problems now, or in the future, please do not hesitate to contact Steve on Telephone 96. This is the School telephone number, but very soon there will be a direct line to the Centre. Steve will advise you of this at a later date. If you happen to be in town, call in to the School to meet and have a yarn with him.

Both Steve and I believe the Contact Centre has tremendous potential to be of beneficial service to you. It is our hope that you will indeed find this to be a reality.

With best wishes and kindest regards,

Yours sincerely,

A.M. GIBSON
PRINCIPAL

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The "windmill" symbol has been used by the Victorian
Country Education Project as its logo since 1978.

